

Occupational Well-Being in Hong Kong Beginning Early Childhood Educators: A Synthesized Model Integrating Job Demands, Job Resources, and Self-Control

Occupational well-being (OWB) among early childhood educators (ECEs) plays an important role in ECEs' job performance, children's development, and the operation of early childhood education sectors. Recently, ECEs' OWB has become an increasing concern both globally and locally, as the job characteristics of early childhood education involve enormous challenges threatening a positive well-being experience at work. This concern is particularly salient for beginning ECEs, because they not only bear as many responsibilities as veteran teachers do but also need to navigate many adaptive changes during the transition from training to teaching. Moreover, beginning teachers' OWB upon employment sets the tone for subsequent well-being and chronic poor OWB leads to a cascade of inefficacy and attrition within the first few years of teaching. Thus, enhancing and sustaining Hong Kong beginning ECEs' OWB is paramount, but what factors, and how these factors, influence beginning ECEs' OWB is rarely known. The job demands-resources (JD-R) model recently proposes a dynamic, yet comprehensively examined, model that delineates how employees' OWB develops at work in relation to job demands, job resources, and self-control. Taking the JD-R model as an overarching framework while also considering other relevant accounts, this project aims to advance the understanding of Hong Kong beginning ECEs' OWB by examining four questions: (1) What are the transitional associations between self-control during pre-service period and the initial levels of OWB? (2) What are the bidirectional associations between job demands, job resources, self-control, and OWB over time? (3) Does self-control mediate the said bidirectional links? and (4) How do beginning ECEs narrate their OWB in relation to job demands, job resources, and self-control?

We plan to conduct a mixed-method study to examine these questions. Firstly, we will implement a four-wave longitudinal research to collect quantitative data in 618 ECEs across the transition from pre-service (i.e., last semester of the training program) to in-service (i.e., up to 14th month since the beginning of the first teaching semester) periods. Secondly, we will select 15 eligible participants for a qualitative research where they share their experiences of OWB. Structure equation modeling and thematic analysis will be used to respectively analyze the quantitative and qualitative data. Theoretically, the findings will advance our understanding of the interplay between organizational and personal factors in shaping beginning ECEs' OWB. Practically, the findings will inform prevention and intervention strategies that foster and sustain Hong Kong beginning ECEs' OWB.